5.1. Agency / Assets of the Women Panchayat Presidents
before Attending Training

62 percent of the respondents did not know the meaning of panchayat and only 38 percent of the respondents stated that they knew the meaning of the panchayat. 83 percent of the respondents did not know about the Indian Constitution and only 17 percent said that they knew. 73 percent of the respondents did not know about the 73rd Amendment and only 32 percent said that they knew about the 73rd Amendment. 59 percent of the respondents did not know about the three tier system and only 41 percent knew about it.

84 percent of the respondents did not know about the Tamil Nadu State Panchayat Act and only 16 percent said that they knew. About 40 percent of the respondents said that they did not know about reservation for women while 60 percent said that they knew about the reservation for women. 74 percent of the respondents did not know the existing status of women and only 26 percent said that they knew. The majority (83 percent) of the respondents did not know the status of the Dalit community and only 17 percent knew. 68 percent of the respondents did not know about social justice and only 32 percent said that they knew. 69 percent of the respondents did not know about planning and only 21 percent said that they knew.
72 percent of the respondents did not know to protect natural resources in the panchayat and only 28 percent said that they knew to protect natural resources in the panchayat. The majority (82 percent) of the respondents did not know to liaison with officers and only 18 percent said that they knew how to liaison with officers. 75 percent of the respondents did not know how to behave in the society as panchayat presidents and only 25 percent said that they knew. 64 percent of the respondents did not know about community based organisations and only 36 percent said that they knew. 70 percent of the respondents did not know how to generate income for the panchayat and only 30 percent said that they knew. 81 percent of the respondents were not able to speak in public and only 19 percent said that they were able to. 64 percent of the respondents did not know to conduct Gram Sabha / panchayat meetings and only 36 percent said that they knew. 88 percent of the respondents did not know about administration of panchayat and only 12 percent said that they knew. 92 percent of the respondents did not know about maintaining panchayat records and registers and only 8 percent said that they knew. 85 percent of the respondents did not know how to tackle problems in the administration of the panchayat and only 15 percent said that they knew.

82 percent of the respondents are not associated with any political parties and only 18 percent said that they were. 79 percent of the respondents hesitated to talk with male leaders and only 21 percent said that they did not. 79 percent of the respondents hesitated to talk with male officers and only 21 percent said that they did not hesitate.
64 percent of the respondents did not know about foundation works for social development and only 36 percent said that they knew. 91 percent of the respondents did not have membership in SHGs and only 9 percent said that they had. 92 percent of the respondents did not have membership in women organizations and only 8 percent said that they had.

5.2. Training Process and the Impact of the Training Programme

83 percent of the respondents said that the contents of the syllabus in the training programme covered all the subjects related to the panchayat administration, panchayat finance and its sources, rights and powers of the panchayat presidents etc. and only 13 percent said that they needed more information. 97 percent of the respondents said that in the training all their doubts relating to the panchayat administration, panchayat finance and its sources, rights and powers of the panchayat presidents etc were clarified and only 3 percent said it did not. 99 percent of the respondents said that the methodology of the training programme was very participative and that the methods of teaching were at their level and that contributed to better understanding of the subjects, but one percent said they had no idea of the training methodology. All the respondents said that they did not discuss unnecessary matters and they made their discussions very relevant to the subject in the entire training programme. 99 percent of the respondents said that the books and materials provided in the training programme were very useful to refer to and created better understanding of the subjects. All the respondents said that they
received information about the training programme such as date, time and venue in advance, which enabled them to attend in time. All the respondents said that they felt very safe in the campus where the training programme was conducted. All the respondents said that they were given freedom and opportunities by the resource persons and training organizers to clarify all their doubts. 95 percent of the respondents said that they were given opportunity to criticize the training programme.

52 percent of the respondents said that changes were made in the syllabus through participatory identification of the trainees’ requirement. 92 percent of the respondents said that they were in contact with the training resource persons/team. 93 percent of the respondents said that the training institute is following up through phone and letter correspondence. 98 percent of the respondents said that the quality of the training has been enhanced. 99 percent of the respondents said that they have developed in panchayat administration due to the training. 99 percent of the respondents said that they had developed transparency in panchayat activities after the training. 89 percent of the respondents said that they have direct involvement in all panchayat activities thanks to the training. 95 percent of the respondents said that division of work among the members was done. 98 percent of the respondents said that they shared the works and exercises during the training programme. 99 percent of the respondents said that they received all the information about the panchayat in the training programme. 99 percent of the respondents said that wrong information was corrected in the training programme.
93 percent of the respondents said that they required further training in Panchayat Raj.

94 percent of the respondents said that they discussed with panchayat officers after the training programme. 83 percent of the respondents said that they are seeking the assistance of NGOs for the development of the panchayat, thanks to the training. 75 percent of the respondents said that they are seeking the assistance of Self Help Groups for the development of the panchayat after the training.

53. Agency / Assets of the Women Panchayat Presidents After Attending Training

98 percent of the respondents learnt how to develop the income of the panchayat. 87 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about social justice. 92 percent of the respondents said that they learnt to plan. 97 percent of the respondents gained knowledge of protecting natural resources in the panchayat. 99 percent of the respondents said that they gathered knowledge on community based organisations.

All the respondents said that they are very clear about the meaning of the panchayat after attending the training programme. 80 percent of the respondents said they are well aware of the Indian Constitution. 77 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about the 73rd Amendment. 81 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about the three tier system. 84 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about the panchayat Raj Act of Tamil Nadu State. 91 percent of the respondents said that they learnt about reservation for women.
94 percent of the respondents said that they gathered knowledge about the existing status of women. 95 percent of the respondents said that they are making liaison with Government officers. 99 percent of the respondents learnt how to behave in the society as panchayat presidents. 92 percent of the respondents said that they became strong and confident to speak in public. 98 percent of the respondents said that they learnt to conduct Gram Sabha / panchayat meetings. All the respondents said that they learnt the administration of the panchayat in the training programme.

98 percent of the respondents said that they maintain panchayat records and registers. 96 percent of the respondents said that they supervise and verify the food supply in anganwadies periodically after attending the training programme. All the women presidents said that they meet the Village Health Nurse very often and review her work and the health status of the women and children in their respective villages. 99 percent of the respondents said that they have ensured water supply and toilet facilities in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme.

98 percent of the respondents said that they are participating in public meetings and festivals in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 90 percent of the respondents said that they are contacting the people in their respective village panchayats after attending the training program. 90 percent of the respondents said that they are assisting the Self Help Groups in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme.

93 percent of the respondents said that they are involved in the
activities of Self Help Groups in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 93 percent of the respondents said that they are properly maintaining sanitation in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme.

98 percent of the respondents said that they are implementing total sanitation in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 98 percent of the respondents said that they are paying special attention to women and child welfare in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. All the respondents said that they are paying special attention to girls’ education in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 93 percent of the respondents said that they are conducting general medical camps in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. All the respondents said that they are properly supervising the government schemes in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme.

85 percent of the respondents said that they are maintaining common property resources in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 82 percent of the respondents said that they undertake tree plantation in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 95 percent of the respondents said that they have provided building facilities for anganwadies/schools in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 94 percent of the respondents said that they are taking efforts for developing the income of the panchayat
in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 94 percent of the respondents said that they have increased the level of women participation in Gram Sabha meetings in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 94 percent of the respondents said that they have improved the level of dalit participation in Gram Sabha meetings in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 97 percent of the respondents said that they are contacting various supportive organizations in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 97 percent of the respondents said that they are properly implementing and maintaining the government orders in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme.

98 percent of the respondents said that they are collecting and maintaining the statistics related to the village panchayat after attending the training programme. 93 percent of the respondents said that they are planning and preparing projects and reports for the development of their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 94 percent of the respondents said that they are undertaking development activities based on the financial position of the panchayat for the development of their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 95 percent of the respondents said that they are paying special attention to women development programmes in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 98 percent of the respondents said that they are attending to women's health in the development of the
nation in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. All the respondents said that they are paying special attention to pre-natal care in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. All the respondents said that they are paying special attention to post-natal care in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 96 percent of the respondents said that they are discussing the problems of women with women in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 96 percent of the respondents said that they are enrolling all eligible children in the school in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 97 percent of the respondents said that they are reenrolling dropped out children in the school in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme. 95 percent of the respondents said that they are preventing child labour in their respective village panchayats after attending the training programme.

5.4. Conclusion

Since the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment empowerment of women at the grassroot level has become a popular concept in India. The reservation of 1/3 of the total seats for women has raised the hope that this critical mass will ultimately bring in the much delayed empowerment of women by utilizing the formal opportunity structure. But the level of their performance does not match the level of expectation though changes have occurred in the system. The elected women panchayat presidents expected to empower the system, themselves and other women through these
opportunity structures, themselves are constrained by many social, political and administrative constraints apart from their families.

These women panchayat presidents are constrained at personal level by illiteracy, shyness, poverty, lack of communication skill, lack of managerial skill, lack of motivation, lack of individual support base, double work load, poor knowledge, low self esteem due to internalization of gender discrimination and a lack of confidence. Domination of males, domination of Traditional panchayats, restrictions on movement, ill-treatment, social divisions, caste discrimination, lack of respect for women are the social constraints under which these women panchayat presidents work. At the institutional level the women panchayat presidents are constrained by the apathy or the negative attitude of officials, the non-co-operation of critical departments, information blockade, wrongly oriented training programmes, interference by public representatives of other bodies and poor resources.

These women had a rough idea about the roles and responsibilities but not a clear understanding of the system in which they have been recently incorporated or their specific roles, responsibilities in it. Though they possessed a superficial knowledge of the panchayat Raj System they developed a belief that having occupied the position they will be able to deliver. They realized little that empowerment of women was the least priority of other segments of the society. These women had also resigned themselves to their position as substitutes of their males and never realized or exercised their power and position. While turning up for the training programme
itself many came because their husbands asked them to attend but, after a few sessions, these women started involving themselves seriously in the training programme and subsequently in local governance.

The training programme of Gandhigram Rural University gave them information, knowledge and managerial and communication skills that instilled sufficient courage in the women panchayat presidents to function.

Before taking this training they feared the officials, other males and even their own clerks. Before giving assent to any of the orders they invariably consulted their husbands or others. Now they have become independent and decide on their own. They are no more afraid of others. These women always went to office as well as met the higher officials along with their husband or some male of their family. After the training they are now attending office alone and meet higher officers and discuss issues on their own. Most of these women rely more on themselves than on their husbands to take decisions because they have started to see things from the point of view of a president rather than that of a woman.

These women possess and exhibit a sound knowledge of the framework, concepts and salient features of the Tamil Nadu panchayat Act apart from having a thorough knowledge of their roles and responsibilities as panchayat presidents. Their attitude towards the office has completely changed and they no longer view the panchayat as an institution to implement government schemes and programmes but as a change agent in charge of human development and social
justice. Their attitude towards other members, officials and their family members has undergone a metamorphosis.

These women exhibit a clear understanding of women issues and the status of Dalits and other weaker sections and also understand the threats to their administration. They go to the root of the issues and find solutions for problems that affect women. The women panchayat presidents are more democratic in their approach and rely heavily on the support of the people to find solutions and take a people centered approach in decision making rather than an implementation approach. They have gained enormous courage from this training programme. There are instances where these women with their newly 'acquired assets have confronted powerful people as well as anti-social elements in the face of personal threats.

The training imparted by GRI has improved the asset endowments of the women panchayat presidents and has improved their ability to make effective choices and convert them into desired action.